

## Ways Women Lead

Do female managers lead differently than their male counterparts? This is a controversial subject on which the experts do not agree, but a recent study by Judy B. Rosener suggests that there may indeed be significant differences between male and female managers.

Rosener surveyed matched samples of male and female business executives in a study conducted for the International Women's Forum. She found that the men tended to prefer a "command and control" or transactional leadership style. "That is, they view job performance as a series of transactions with subordinates exchanging rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance. The men are also more likely to use power that comes from their organizational position and formal authority."

The first female managers employed a similar leadership style, but as more women have penetrated the upper echelons of the business world, a new approach has evolved that Rosener believes is increasingly characteristic of female executives.

Rosener describes these manager's leadership as transformational or interactive, suggesting four principles that are especially helpful in understanding their approach:

1. Most female managers strongly encourage participation by trying to make their subordinates feel like they are important parts of the organizations. These managers solicit input on a wide range of issues, and may create informal groups in which ideas can be shared. Such tactics help managers obtain as much information as possible before decisions are made, and employee support for these decisions increases as a result.

2. Rosener found that effective female managers willingly share power and information. They care little for "turf" and readily explain the reasons behind their actions. This encourages loyalty among subordinates and sets an example that promotes enhanced communication flow throughout the organization.

3. Female managers also try consciously to enhance the self-worth of others, constantly praising the work of their subordinates and sending them small signals of recognition.

4. Finally, these managers encourage others to feel as enthusiastic about their work as they themselves do.

Rosener believes that there are two principal sources of the interactive approach to leadership. One is traditional female gender role socialization, which is clearly compatible with this style. The other concerns the career paths followed by the women in the sample. Few boast resumes with long histories of holding organizational positions that control substantial resources and power; many got started in volunteers activities where motivation comes from sources other than pay and promotion. Furthermore, as these women entered the business world, they found "...themselves in positions consistent with the roles they played at home: in staff positions rather than line positions, supporting the work of others, and in functions like communications or human resources where they had relatively small budgets and few people reporting directly to them."

Most of the respondents were employed in medium-sized firms that had experienced fast growth and rapid change-organizations that appear to be particularly likely to benefit from interactive leadership. These businesses put a strong emphasis on clear performance standards, which made it easier for women to overcome traditional sexist attitudes as they climbed up the hierarchy. The interactive managers also tended to work for firms that employed relatively large numbers of highly educated young professionals, a group which is notoriously uncomfortable with traditionally rigid male leadership styles.

**Source**

Rosener, Judy B. "Ways Women Lead," Harvard Business Review (68/6), Nov-Dec, 1990, pp. 119-125.